

## Thinking the unthinkable with Herman Kahn

## What will life be like in the year 2000?

BARBARA CADY

Would you like to know how the majority of Americans like their sex? Or what the yearly per capita income for the average Indian peasant is? Or when, if ever, the world's energy supply will reach a critical low? Or why Japan is destined to exercise hegemony over the eastern half of the globe in the decades to come?

If so, Herman Kahn is the man to talk to. He could provide you, not only with the factual data to support his answers, but, if you so wished, could even interrelate all of those seemingly disparate questions into one, sweeping, meaningful projection — possibly the survival potential for the Judeo-Christian ethic in Western Europe for the next thirty years.

Herman Kahn thinks like that. And what's more, he gets paid for it. As director of the Hudson Institute, a think tank in Croton-on-Hudson, New York, Kahn brainstorms on retainer, selling the chunks of information he and his research staff prepare to governments, military personnel, private citizens, and multi-national corporations. In short, to anybody who'll buy.

But make no mistake. It's Kahn who's selling, not Kahn who's being bought. On this point he is quite clear, pointing out that he is his own man, that he imposes his intelligence on what he chooses to impose it on, and that he is responsible to no one except himself and God. Coming from one of the primary architects of America's cold war nuclear strategy, this insistence on ethical rectitude might ring a little flat to some ears.

But Herman Kahn talks like that. Using phrases like most people use words, he tosses jumbled concepts into the air and then unscrambles them before your very eyes. He can twirl his ego in one hand and his genius in the other — all the while delivering humorous and self-deprecating patter about his lack of humility. And he is infinitely charming.

Herman Kahn is a tough act to follow.

**CADY:** What are your predictions for the year 2,000?

**KAHN:** There are two kinds of predictions we have for the end of the century. Some of them are sort of trends, like economic and technological trends, which tend to have a certain momentum behind them, a real force. They seem to have quite a bit of staying power. And, even if we have a depression or war, they often smooth themselves out. It's always nice to talk about those first, because you feel a little strong about them.

You always start these conversations with GNP (Gross National Product), and you think of the GNP at the end of the century having about, say, four per cent growth rates. And you're talking about 25 years. That's a factor of roughly three. GNP per capita should be roughly a factor of two — what you have today. What does that change? Well, it changes a lot. There's just a lot more millionaires in this country. There's just a lot more people with lots of money. There's very few people with very little money. There's almost nobody making less than \$5,000 per family. You still have people in poverty but you're not embarrassed by it. The poverty is psychological.

Now, in America, one of the costs of a capitalist country such as the United States is that we humiliate people who are at the bottom of the heap to a certain degree. We blame them morally for being poor, in fact. My own belief is that the main reason for the so-called fatherless Negro family is because in our culture the man who doesn't support his family is looked upon with contempt. Why stay around if people are contemptuous of you? We notice the same kind of thing in many Indian groups and tribes.

**Has this anything to do with the Protestant Ethic?**

Yes. Basically, every man has to support his family. Now the Protestant ethic does not have contempt for the man who's only living at the bottom. But you must support your family. It's an absolute moral obligation. Now, in some cultures being at the bottom is less psychologically harmful. I would guess that a good deal of that harm will be lessened by the end of the century in our country for these

reasons — we won't blame them, nor will we feel guilt about it. See, today there is enormous guilt by upper middle class elites about the poor, particularly the Negro poor, the racist poor. That guilt will largely disappear by the end of the century.

On the other hand, you're getting something new about the Negroes and the Mexicans. When they were poor, they really didn't think of themselves as being maltreated, as people think they did. More and more they blame the system for their problems, while the system is less and less responsible. That's a basis for neuroses.

You have another problem. For a number of reasons about 70 per cent of the Negroes are going up quite rapidly — upper middle class, middle

class, and more and more increase. For example, today most intellectuals wouldn't be caught dead driving a Cadillac. The Cadillac is the Negro car, the Mafia car, the Jewish contractor. It's the epitome of lower middle class squares. They just wouldn't be caught dead driving a Cadillac, but they may have a \$2,000 hi-fi. Or they'll drive a Ferrari or Mercedes Benz. They ride a bike, but they'll spend \$5,000 on the musical system. This kind of thing will be very common.

We tend to expect a kind of a mosaic culture, by which we mean enormous permissiveness in styles of life — if you don't bother other people. As long as you keep it to yourself. Now this you only see in the communal hippie groups. They live in all

*By the year 2,000, will the squares have picked up anything from the counter-culture?*

Sure. But less than you might have expected originally. That is, as they get richer, as they get safer, the old square values erode. The kind of square values you have in America today probably will not take a lengthy period of wealth and safety. Now, there are square-type values that will take a lengthy period of wealth and safety, but not in the United States. This is a reasonable guess. On the other hand, they may last a generation or two — with wealth and safety.

I would guess in the year 2,000 you would have almost the maximum cleavage between the two cultures. The upper class is very much hedonistic, sexually free, basically

preserve the values of a three-year-old into adulthood. I don't think it works. More likely, the counter-culture will evolve and change into more survivable forms.

My own guess is that the survival forms of the counter-culture are not "each man does his own thing" — total permissiveness, if you will — but more like the French, Chinese, English gentleman traditions, whose standards are very high. But they are not the standards of the squares.

*Eccentrics? Dilettants?*

A dilettant is part of it. If you're a Frenchman, you must speak the language well, with precision. No mistakes are tolerated. You must know your literature. Ignorance is not tolerated. You must have decent manners. You have many skills, and all of which are at a high level of performance, none of which are useful. But they're important to being a well-rounded individual. You're interested in adventure, in sex and danger. You climb mountains, things like that. Everything is a game, but the game is dead serious. It's not each man to his own bag. Each man performs well at all of these games.

*I have difficulty envisioning social planning in the years ahead as a super-futuristic thing. What will the organs of social planning be like in 2,000?*

I'm hoping that this type of planning will become more serious and professional — by which I also mean becomes less professional. That is the one thing that has become very clear, that the professional, narrow expert is a kind of a failure at all serious problems.

Now let me define what I mean by an intellectual. And this is intended not to be an invidious definition, but an accurate definition. An intellectual is a man who deals with ideas on the basis of second-hand information learned from school or from books, not by direct contact with phenomena. A doctor is not an intellectual if he's dealing with patients. But a doctor who'd never had patients would be an intellectual. To a remarkable degree, our social planning has been done by doctors who are intellectuals, not by doctors who practice with patients. And it's been incredibly incompetent.

Again, let's go to the French system. The French train some of the best pilots in the world. They often make all the mistakes of the intellectuals, but there is something in their training that makes them make those mistakes less often. The problems of France are that they are run by intellectuals. The greatness of France is that their intellectuals perform rather well — though they make all the mistakes.

The Americans have shown a talent over the last 200 years for marrying theory with practice. We have not done this in social planning in the last ten years. It's been kind of a disaster — with the exception, of course, of the work I do.

*Of course.*

I'm hoping this planning will be done with some standards of performance in the future. If it's not done, then I think we'll run into serious troubles. Because the problems will more and more have an intellectual character to them. They can't be done by experience, because experience has cost too much. You can't learn how to fight a thermonuclear war by experience. You can't learn how to deal with many of the technological phenomena that are coming up by experience. Too expensive. You've got to think them through and learn them through theory as much as possible.

I think one of three things is going to happen. Intellectuals will continue to louse it up. The remark that Buckley made as what most Americans would accept — "I'd rather be governed by the first 100 names in the Boston phone book, than by the Harvard faculty" — gets to be understood more and more as a serious remark. As a deadly serious remark. And you get enormous animosity against intellectuals. That means that you make all the mistakes that the squares make; they make their own set of mistakes.

What are the usual two mistakes? The squares can tell when it's black

(please turn to page 6)



Herman Kahn outlines his view of the future on two one-hour specials airing Monday, Feb. 12, and Monday, Feb. 19, at 10:00 P.M. on KCET, Channel 28. Also

participating will be environmentalist David Brower as well as moderators Victor and Tita Palmier. (Photo by Richard Robinson.)

class. Doing quite well. No real problems at all. About 20 to 30 per cent are in various kinds of poor areas where they're not moving very fast. In fact, they are standing still in many cases, maybe even going backwards in some ways.

It's very hard to renew racism without these people. That is, people are going to blame them for their failure, call it genetic. I don't know if this is true or not. Nobody knows what the boundaries between genetic and hereditary and cultural factors are.

Let me backtrack a bit. Let's start with the GNP per capita (in 2,000 A.D.) Twice as rich per capita income, three times the total GNP. My guess in terms of the physical plant around here that there will be enormous effort in taking care of the country. That means it'll be like Holland rather than like Belgium, but much better in terms of streams, quality of air, all this kind of stuff.

My guess is that certain kinds of problems will not be with us anymore. One, the problem of poverty in terms of pressing hard on the minimum essentials of life, just disappears completely. That's almost true today. The problem of poverty as intensive differences between the rich and the poor will probably be exacerbated enormously. But there'll be an increasing number of people who'll drop out of upper middle class life, or in fact, become voluntarily poor. And that will change the problem of poverty quite a bit. It's funny. Hippies are embarrassed about poverty.

*It's also chic.*

Yeah, it's chic today. As the real poor more and more disappear, the

parts of the country, where ten, twenty years ago there would have been violence. So long as they don't give marijuana to the local kids, nobody bothers them.

In many cases, the hippies don't have the sense to stay away from the local community. But more and more they have that sense. People don't understand that. I'm always shocked at my young friends who drive around with flowers on the cars, hippie-style, and have marijuana in the car. I say — "Look, you can flaunt the fact that you're different, but don't have a checkable crime with you then." They'll understand that better.

You're going to probably have a two-class system. The upper middle class and middle class America are breaking apart very fast. Both think of each other as totally immoral. Both are quite moral in their own way. I would say that middle America is more moral than upper class America. The upper class is basically hedonistic. Hedonism, by everybody's definition, is "not moral."

*Paganistic?*

Not pagan as much as hedonistic. In fact, hedonism is almost never a philosophy of life. It's very rare. You find it in upper middle class America now. Happiness and pleasure are the end of life. But it's very rare. I don't think it works. I think it leads to neuroses and breakdown.

*In the September issue of Intellectual Digest you spoke of the square winning out.*

I said in the next five to ten years they'll win out. Ultimately, I think they both lose.

anti-patriotic, anti-cosmopolitan, relativistic, humanistic. They use the term — you've got to be careful of the word "humanism," by the way. The word basically describes the Renaissance phenomenon of return to Greek Roman values. This is a return to heroic values and to rationality, as opposed to the Catholic church. Today, we use the word humanism to mean anti-heroic, anti-rational, to mean joy, love, mysticism. The middle American will be humanistic in the old Greek-Roman Renaissance sense. The upper middle class will be humanistic in the new sense.

By the way, I don't think the Europeans will go the way of the American upper middle class. I think the Europeans will use the word humanism in the old sense.

*Will the counter-culture in 2,000 be like Bohemia was in the twenties and thirties?*

No, because Bohemia is very tense about its freedom. It's not relaxed at all. It falters in your face. It'll be like Bohemians thought they were, not the way they really were. But the counter-culture has another problem, which I think may kill it. The Bohemians have square fathers and mothers, very square grandparents. So, whether or not they liked it, they were not Bohemians. The other values influenced their life immensely. It's not all clear that the children of counter-culture parents can sort of survive.

We have never seen a culture which has been based on really being children, of being three year-olds. That's what the counter-culture is, if you look at it carefully. Trying to

# 'One who is not an intellectual is absolutely immune to propaganda on things he believes that he understands!'

(continued from page 5)

and when it's white: when it's day and when it's night. They're very good at that. You can't confuse them. Intellectuals are often good at grey zone and twilight zone issues, but sometimes mistake black for white, day for night.

I'd say it's very uncertain what happens here: whether our education turns out intellectuals who can govern or intellectuals who'll be a disaster and just be rejected by the system. That's what's currently going on.

I'll give you some examples. The gap ideas. The developed nation makes 2,000, the underdeveloped nation makes 200. You double both, the gap is doubled at both — 3,400. You're worse off. Let me tell you, if you go from \$200 to \$400 per capita, that extra money makes the difference between real poverty and relative wealth. It's very important for these people to go to 400. You go from 2,000 to 4,000, they couldn't care less. It's none of their business. Anybody who's been to an undeveloped nation must have found

up. George Orwell understood this. Double-speak and double-think were only for the intellectuals and decision-makers, not for the workers. You can't talk them out of it. They just won't believe it. If you go to the south of France, there are still not good Catholics there. Why? Six centuries ago, the Catholic church wiped out the Albigensians. But they still know there's something wrong with the Catholic church. These are the best propagandists in the world.

You go to small towns in Portugal, you still find these families who every Friday night do ceremonies — I reckon it's the Jewish ceremony — since 1492. Four hundred and fifty years ago. Nothing stamps it out. It's very important to understand that. The use of language and newspapers has enormous influence on intellectuals and decision-makers, and they think it makes the same impact on the mass of people. It does not.

What about Hitler's concept of the big lie?

printed it, but the government shouldn't have tried to stop them. That's a very intelligent position, not bigoted at all. But say another Ellsberg case occurred, and again he was made into a hero. The general public then will be willing to believe plot theories. So, I'm not saying you can't take these kinds of issues and make them into a kind of terrible myth. I'm saying there must be some kind of a contact with reality before you can do it.

We tend to worry a lot in our country about the average guy picking up some crazy fascist-type myth and blaming them for all the problems. But, in a way, I put it the other way. The intellectual is doing that all the time. He thinks that the reason why people have suburbia and cars is because big corporations make profits out of those things. We have suburbia and cars because people like it. It is true that big corporations make profits out of it. And it is true that they exploit it and try to encourage the trend. But they couldn't have sold it, if there wasn't a desire for it.

Now it's also true that people have to be raised in the culture to like these things. But that's true of anything you like or dislike. The idea that a person chooses his values at the age of eighteen is the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my life. Your values are pretty well formed when you are 7 or 8. Unless you go through extraordinary situations, they don't change much. So to say that the reason these people picked this thing is that their values were formed by the system is outrageous. It's a tautology.

You were one of the first to apply probability and game theory to thermonuclear warfare . . .

You have to be a little careful about that. There's no game theory, no computers, just common sense. Systematic thinking, yes.

Well, probability is systematized logic with numbers.

Not numbers. They weren't used. People got the craziest idea of what the sensible work was. There's a pacifist group like Rappaport's, who did try to use game theory, who did try to use computers. And that was the good use of game theory. Then there was the bad use by people like myself. Only we didn't use game theory.

What did you use that was bad? Logic?

Yeah. We used the simplest idea. We used acting. Role-playing. We said — "How do people act?" Now we may have been right or wrong on how our theories about how people acted.

We would just ask how people act in a situation. We took extreme situations, because some of these situations are very bizarre. I would say that why people did it badly — and many people did — was because they depended too much on the simple situations. The people who did better, on the whole, were the students of history, international relations, sociology — but sociology in the practical sense, not the theoretical sense.

One thing about this, you must actually think about it. Thinking the unthinkable. People weren't thinking about it, or to the extent that they were, were picking very abstract models which didn't have anything to do with reality. It's easier to do that and less emotional.

The big contribution of this kind of person was that they corrected mistakes that the military made. But the military prevented them from making the kind of mistakes they made. Rather than sharing each others' mistakes, they cancelled each others' mistakes.

For example, in the early Fifties, the military came up with "fail-safe." Fail-safe meant the following. You could make two kinds of mistakes in a war. You could launch the forces when they shouldn't be launched, or fail to launch them when they should be. To them, fail-safe meant that they should never make the second mistake of failing to launch them when they should be. So they should be launched in all circumstances. That makes an accidental war very probable.

Civilians straightened that out. They said — "No, no, you're crazy. We would much better risk failing to launch them when they should be

launched than launching them when they shouldn't be launched." The word fail-safe changes its meaning completely. You wanted to fail. That meant the enemy could exploit that in attacking your forces. They said fine. We prefer running that risk than the other risk of accidental war.

You can see why the military make the other mistake. They want high-performance military forces, and they're worried less about the accidental war issue. The civilian wants high-performance military forces too, but he's more worried about the accidental war.

The military were very interested in reacting fast. They hated the idea of sitting there accepting the enemy attack. It's passive, it's female, and it's dangerous. So they were in favor of quick reactions. The civilians said — "That's insane."

Civilians make mistakes of another sort. They don't understand the necessity for Dynamic action. But this one they understood perfectly. The President can be under great pressure, but he knows his forces can't be destroyed, even if the enemy strikes first. Then the civilians went crazy. They thought the only purpose of the forces was to kill Russians.

Mega-bodies.

Yeah, mega-bodies. The word mega-bodies is a pacifist phrase. I

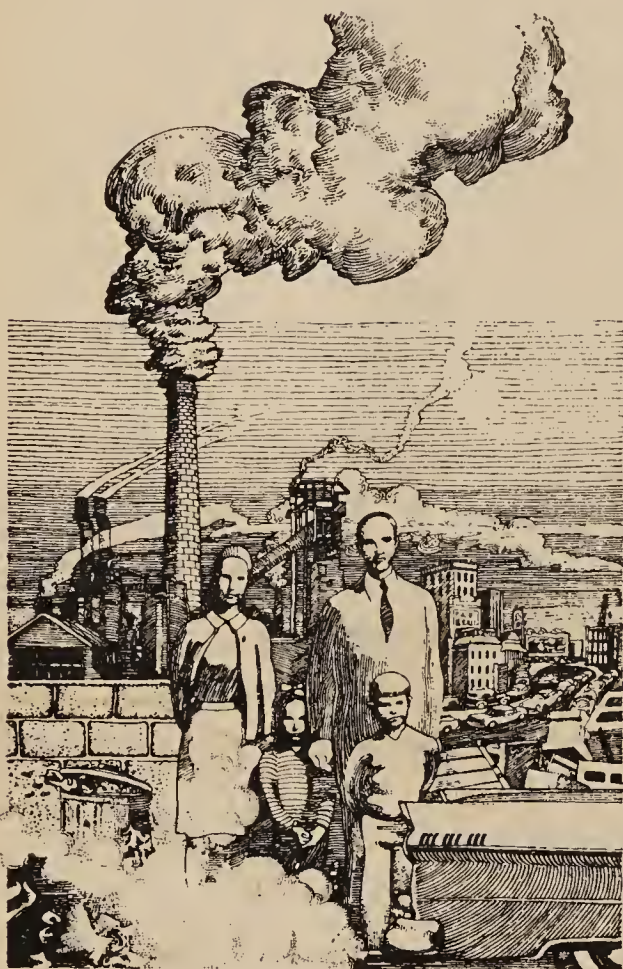
boat, the consequences of rocking the boat, if it went badly, might be so horrible that they didn't want to take the trip.

We didn't really understand how cautious the decision-makers would be in practice. We *did* understand how they might be reckless under some circumstances, but we didn't understand the caution very well.

We did understand the ease with which nuclear weapons would be prevented from proliferating. We used to assume that any nation would get nuclear weapons were they compelled to do so. Some fifteen years have passed and no nation has announced a nuclear weapons program. China was the last as far as we know. We think the Israelis have done some work. The Indians and the Japanese have done some work. But, in fact, there's been no real rush for it. That was a surprise. I think we underestimated the degree to which war would actually be unthinkable among the top military people and the top civilians.

What are your ethical preoccupations?

Basically I come out of a very rabbinical tradition. If I walk with God, I don't need anybody else's ok. That sounds terribly self-centered. When I wrote this book, I mentioned to my wife that there'd be a lot of criticism of



that out, if he keeps his eyes open. If they could double their income, they couldn't care less what's going on in the United States. They're interested in the rate at which they can increase their wealth, not in any comparison with America.

What's your opinion of Michael Harrington?

Harrington's a very perceptive guy. He describes phenomena very accurately quite often, and then misinterprets it. He's the first man to notice that the poor were invisible in the United States. What he didn't understand is that they weren't really poor. That's why they are invisible. They are poor *relatively*, and it makes a very big difference. The poor in the United States dress like other people. They look like other people. It's a dead giveaway that they aren't really poor. He didn't notice that at all. But he did notice that the poor were invisible . . .

American like suburbia. They know what they like. They're not being dumb or foolish and nobody's sold them a bill of goods. They like that style of life. An important thing is that you can't sell Edsels by advertising. Let me make a stronger state yet than that. Only intellectuals and decision makers are strongly influenced by propaganda, in all aspects of their life. One who is not an intellectual, not a decision-maker is absolutely immune to propaganda on things that he believes he understands. I make a restriction here — on things he believes he understands.

You can see that in Eastern Europe. In the Fifties and Sixties, intellectuals were saying the very language of protest has been destroyed just before they blew it all

I'm saying it's basically not true. Take the Jews. Inside of Germany in the Weimar Republic, the Jews were playing a very strange role, similar to what are called the trans-ethics here in the United States today. The trans-ethics are the middle Jewish, upper class Episcopalian, upper class Congregationalist, Unitarian, Quaker, upper class Methodist.

Disenfranchised Jesuits.

Any young Jesuit under thirty-five. Most of the young Maryknoll. What's the role they're playing. In a square culture, they're trying to teach that sex should be open and free, like a glass of water. To the average American, that's straight corruption of the young.

The average American believes you've got to have jails to keep people in line. Public pornography, anti-capital punishment — you can go through a whole list of things. It's very easy for a demagogue to say — "They're trying to corrupt us" — and make it the work of the devil.

Now you and I know that none of these people have evil intentions and you might even agree with that. But you could see how somebody could take them and paint them as the devil, and make a very good case. They've corrupted the press, the political process, the morals, the institutions. Hitler used that. What he took was things they actually knew, were actually happening, and reinterpreted it. That kind of reinterpretation you can sell to the general public. The big lie works there.

Making Ellsberg into a hero makes the average American literally sick. When they were polled, they said Ellsberg shouldn't have done it. *The New York Times* shouldn't have



James McClintock LNS

was shocked by the number of reviews that said I coined the word "mega-deaths" and used it in my book. It doesn't appear anywhere. I've never used the term.

You've never even thought it.

No, I've thought of deaths of 80 times 10 to the 6th (800 million) which is mega-deaths. But it's not a term which communicates anything except callousness and surrealistic horror.

I wrote in my book *On Thermonuclear War* that people didn't go to war just because the other side was vulnerable. I made a comment that I thought the United States could take 2,000 bombers, put them in Times Square, turn off the radars, print in the newspapers what we'd done, and I don't think the Russians would attack us. But that doesn't mean that I think that's a satisfactory state of affairs. It's a bad way to live.

What have you learned since *On Thermonuclear War*?

Well, most of our theory of war holds up pretty well. The book was written carefully, because we knew it would be read by a lot of hostile critics.

The main mistakes were, first of all . . . one of the major arguments of our theory of war is that, if both sides have invulnerable forces (so you can't hit each others' forces but you can hit the civilians) that's like a non-aggression treaty. You're never going to attack each other. That's suicide. And that non-aggression treaty is so strong that you can push each other around as much as you want. And people push each other around very hard.

In fact, they didn't do that. Both sides acted very cautiously. Even though it might be safe to rock the

it. That book was written to make the world safer. I had no apologies to make to anyone. I couldn't have cared less.

I'm much more sensitive to criticism today than I was twenty or thirty years ago. As I get older I get more annoyed at crazy criticisms or dumb criticisms. But when I wrote the book I couldn't have cared less. My friends knew I was a decent guy. I knew I was a decent guy. And we both knew I could have gotten more money and prestige elsewhere. That was the labor of a man who really thought he was working with God, if you will, for humanity — preventing war and, if war did happen, reducing the damage.

I was really shocked. Here I wrote a book saying — "You've bought this equipment, understand how to use it." I made all kinds of sensible recommendations. My ethical position was unbelievably good, as far as I was concerned. I find the same types of critics trying to undercut the peace talks with absolute *savoir faire*.

I have a general idea that, unless you have a very good reason for not doing so, tell the truth as you see it. I don't believe you should always necessarily tell the truth. But unless you have a quite good reason for not telling the truth, go ahead and tell it.

Generally speaking, you have to trust your judgement on certain issues, but not on big issues of this sort. You've no right to. On the question of the peace talks, for example. You have no right to sabotage the President when he's trying to make peace. It's just crazy. And they do it without a moment's hesitation. They don't even know they're doing it.